

SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

Metal-eating by *Stegobium paniceum* (Linnaeus) (Coleoptera: Anobiidae).—For some time during the summer of 1996, I had been finding biscuit beetles (*Stegobium paniceum*) floating in the milk of my early morning breakfast cereal. I gave it little thought until I discovered, one evening, that almost every packet of flour and sugar was to some extent infested. My enthusiastic examination of the entire contents of the pantry showed that *Stegobium* had found its way into much else besides my whole-wheat malted shreddiees. It had invaded various types of pasta, jars of pine kernels, sesame seeds and dried beans and the egg noodles had been riddled to look like ticker-tape. Even the cat biscuits, knocked underneath the gas boiler by hungry felines, showed the characteristic round exit holes. However, the most astonishing target of their attentions was a foil-wrapped stock cube.

The metal foil had been neatly nibbled away in several places (Fig. 1). Most of these would have been exit holes, but at least one hole must have been the entrance by which the first female got inside to oviposit—apart from the chewings of the beetles, the foil wrapping seemed to be intact.

Metal-eating in insects is not often reported, but Paclt (1956) lists several beetles (notably cerambycids and the domestic woodworm beetle *Anobium punctatum* (Degeer)) known to have attacked metals. As with the *Stegobium*, the cases were mainly of beetles gnawing their exit holes through some metal casing or lining. White (1851) reported *Anobium* chewing its exit holes through first 2-mm and then 4-mm lead lining on a wooden cistern. Paclt recorded that in most cases, the metals attacked by these wood-boring insects were of a similar hardness to the wood they normally ate and thus presented little problem for their strong mandibles. *Stegobium* is closely related to *Anobium*, but nevertheless it would seem that metal-eating for the biscuit beetle was quite a change from its normal soft and crumbly diet.—RICHARD A. JONES, 13 Bellwood Road, Nunhead, London SE15 3DE.

REFERENCES

- Paclt, J. 1956. Animals attacking metals. *Ent. Ber., Amst.* 16: 175–178.
 White, A. 1851. [Lead perforated by *Anobium striatum* (= *punctatum*), exhibit at Linnean Society meeting of 18 November 1851.] *Proc. Linn. Soc. London* 2: 153–154.



Fig. 1. Oxo stock cube attacked by the biscuit beetle, *Stegobium paniceum*. The cube has been turned over revealing an elongate hole made against the bottom of a tin container. A specimen of the beetle is just visible in this groove.